



Peace and Conflict Studies

Volume 9 | Number 2

Article 4

12-1-2002

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Recommended Citation

Chaitin, Julia; Obeidi, Fida; Adwan, Sami; and Bar-On, Dan (2002) "Environmental Work and Peace Work: The Palestinian-Israeli Case," *Peace and Conflict Studies*: Vol. 9: No. 2, Article 4.

Available at: <http://nsuworks.nova.edu/pcs/vol9/iss2/4>

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Environmental Work and Peace Work: The Palestinian-Israeli Case

Abstract

This paper, based on a larger study that was carried out by a joint Palestinian – Israeli research team before and during the Al Aqsa Intifada, examines Israeli and Palestinian non-governmental organizations (NGOs) that have worked on joint environmental projects. We focus here on three jointly run Palestinian – Israeli NGOs, 16 Israeli organizations and 12 Palestinian organizations that engaged in cooperative work, looking at the kind of work they did, their perceptions of the causes of environmental damage and its connection to the conflict, their perceptions of the roles of NGOs within their societies, and obstacles encountered in cooperative work. Data about the NGOs were collected through face-to-face audio taped interviews, their publications, and from their websites. Results showed that while the Israeli and Palestinian NGOs agree that joint work is needed to address ecological problems, they differ in their reasons for working together, their perceptions of the sources of environmental deterioration, the roles that NGOs should be taking within their society, the relationship of the Israeli – Palestinian conflict to the state of the environment, and the effect that a final peace agreement would have on solving these problems. It was concluded that the “environmental narratives” of the two sides differ greatly, and that the establishment of a “culture of peace” is a very long-term process.

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Julia Chaitin received her PhD in Social Psychology from Ben Gurion University of the Negev (Beer Sheva, Israel). Her research focuses on the long-term psycho-social impact of social traumas (the Holocaust, wars, the Palestinian-Israeli conflict) on survivors of the traumas and their descendants. In 2001-2002 she held the Lentz Post-doctoral Fellowship in Peace and Conflict Research at the University of Missouri-St. Louis. Dr. Chaitin is a lecturer in the Faculties of Humanities and Social Sciences at Ben Gurion University where she also co-directs the Israeli Center for Qualitative Methodologies. In addition to this work, she is a researcher and grant writer for the Peace Research Institute in the Middle East (PRIME) and a member of To Reflect and Trust (TRT).

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Sami Adwan earned his Ph.D. in 1987 in educational administration from the University of San Francisco. He is currently a professor of education at Bethlehem University. In conjunction with Israeli researchers and educators, he has undertaken a number of studies on education and peace-building, which include: learning to live together, comparative analyses of Israeli and Palestinian history and civil education textbooks, the role of history teachers in peace-building, and the historical perceptions of Israeli and Palestinian Youth. Professor Adwan is a member of To Reflect and Trust (TRT), and he co-directs the Peace Research Institute in the Middle East (PRIME). He has organized, participated and attended many conferences related to Palestinian education issues and peace education and has published many articles on these topics. Professor Adwan has been the recipient of grants from UNESCO/Paris, USIP, UNESCO Commission/Germany, Georg Eckert Institute/Germany, Friends of the Hebrew University, PCG, Rabin Center, and the UNICEF Commission in Italy, Palestine and EU.

Dan Bar-On received his Ph.D. in psychology from the Hebrew University of Jerusalem and is a professor of psychology in the Department of Behavioral Sciences at Ben-Gurion University. Professor Bar-On initiated To Reflect and Trust (TRT) an international dialogue group composed of descendants of Nazis and Holocaust

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ENVIRONMENTAL WORK AND PEACE WORK: THE PALESTINIAN-ISRAELI CASE

Julia Chaitin, Fida Obeidi, Sami Adwan, and Dan Bar-On

Abstract

This paper, based on a larger study that was carried out by a joint Palestinian – Israeli research team before and during the Al Aqsa Intifada, examines Israeli and Palestinian non-governmental organizations (NGOs) that have worked on joint environmental projects. We focus here on three jointly run Palestinian – Israeli NGOs, 16 Israeli organizations and 12 Palestinian organizations that engaged in cooperative work, looking at the kind of work they did, their perceptions of the causes of environmental damage and its connection to the conflict, their perceptions of the roles of NGOs within their societies, and obstacles encountered in cooperative work. Data about the NGOs were collected through face-to-face audio taped interviews, their publications, and from their websites. Results showed that while the Israeli and Palestinian NGOs agree that joint work is needed to address ecological problems, they differ in their reasons for working together, their perceptions of the sources of environmental deterioration, the roles that NGOs should be taking within their society, the relationship of the Israeli – Palestinian conflict to the state of the environment, and the effect that a final peace agreement would have on solving these problems. It was concluded that the “environmental narratives” of the two sides differ greatly, and that the establishment of a “culture of peace” is a very long-term process.

Introduction

The Palestinian – Israeli conflict has torn apart the Middle East for over one hundred years, since the beginning of modern Zionism when European Jews began immigrating to the region (Bickerton & Klausner, 2002). While most of the joint Israeli - Palestinian history has been one of bloodshed, after the signing of the Declaration of Principles in 1993, it appeared as if there was a real move toward peace. The outbreak of the Al Aqsa Intifada at the end of September 2000, however, brought to the limelight the anger and frustrations felt by Palestinians concerning their perception of the peace process. The renewed cycle of extreme violence has resulted, at the time of this writing, in the deaths of close to 1300 Palestinians and 500 Israelis (The Israeli Information Center for Human Rights in the Occupied Territories: B'tselem, 2002).

This paper looks at a different kind of “casualty” of the peace process – Israeli and Palestinian non-governmental organizations (NGOs) that, during

the peace era, worked together on projects aimed at enhancing not only the regional environment but also the development of peaceful relationships between the neighbors as well. After the outbreak of the Intifada, most of this work came to a standstill.

In this paper, we look at results of a pilot study undertaken by a research team of two Palestinians and two Israelis from PRIME (Peace Research Institute in the Middle East) – a jointly-run Palestinian – Israeli non-governmental organization (NGO) that carries out research aimed at enhancing reconciliation between the Israeli and Palestinian peoples. We offer here an overview of jointly run NGOs and separate Palestinian and Israeli NGOs that have engaged in cooperative environmental work. We present the perceptions of these organizations regarding the connection between the environment and the conflict and peace process. We look at the issues and activities on which they focused, their understandings of their role in their respective societies, their perceptions of the causes of environmental damage and its connection to the conflict, and obstacles encountered in cooperative work. We also offer some theoretical understandings and practical aspects of NGO work relevant for the Palestinian – Israeli conflict. We will begin with a short review of the literature concerning the role of NGOs, in general, in societies in conflict, and in Israel and the Palestinian Authority in particular.

The Role of NGOs in Recent Years

Since the 1980's, there has been an increase in the work and influence of non-governmental organizations across the globe. While these organizations have no legal control over territory or peoples, many government officials accept and recognize their worth. The definitions of NGOs vary, as do their appearance (Weiss & Gordenker 1996). Here we define NGOs as non-profit organizations that abstain from participation in state power, identifying four ideal types: *Campaign organizations*, that concentrate on mobilization of its members and the public; *Expert organizations*, that provide consultation services and public dissemination of information; *Humanitarian organizations*, that directly support people in need; and *Grassroots organizations*, comprised of self-organizing citizens who undertake local projects. While this is a useful categorization tool, in reality it is often difficult to clearly differentiate the types.

There are close to twenty five thousand known NGOs in the world, in all political fields (Union of International Associations 2002). While NGOs mostly originated in Western democracies, they later emerged in societies with more totalitarian systems of government. While today they are a culturally transcendent universal phenomenon, NGOs have not lost their local and regional specifics, in part due to their ability to adopt endogenous traditions of self-organization (Dardy de Oliveira & Tandon 1994).

NGOs attempt to deter institutions from acting in ways perceived as being detrimental to society and they can work in ways that are either “top down” or “bottom up”. They do so in the forms of: (a) “internationalising politics”, in which NGOs pressure their governments to pressure other governments to change attitudes and practices on certain issues; (b) “trans-national politics”, in which NGOs form networks to simultaneously achieve similar changes in other states and to influence international debates (Keck & Sikkink 1998) and; (c) “supranational politics”, in which the organization assumes a multinational form and establishes its own head office.

There is consensus among researchers that NGOs often succeed in exerting political influence (Clark 1995; Spiro 1995) by introducing topics into international debate, by agenda setting, fighting for new norms, proposing and facilitating negotiations, or pressuring reluctant governments to make changes. Through such means as “second track” processes, NGOs also try to bring about changes in behavior of government or citizens by taking direct action themselves, such as providing aid for people in need through humanitarian and development organizations.

Environmental and Social Justice NGOs

NGOs specializing in environmental and social justice issues have become visible in the world arena. For example, there are “expert” NGOs that have won over state bureaucracies and the public to their causes after determining the need for a specific environmental action. NGOs also provide information or apply pressure (Rucht 1996; Lahusen 1996) to steer negotiation processes over environmental issues into certain directions, then translate their aims into action and into a tightening up of regulations (Gehring 1994; Haas 1992).

There is evidence that social justice NGOs working within their societies have been successful in fighting for the human rights of indigenous peoples. For example, the Guatemalan umbrella NGO, *Unidad de Accion Sindical y Popular* (UASP), has undertaken activities on a number of social justice issues, including lobbying for the rights of Mayan groups (McCleary, 1996). Other research on human rights NGOs has shown that cooperative networks of international, national and local organizations have often contributed to a change of political and legal circumstances in states in which human rights have been systematically violated (e.g., Risse, Ropp & Sikkink, 1999).

The effectiveness of local organizations working on these issues is difficult to measure. Since these NGOs work on a smaller scale and are far less documented than the big and supra-national organizations, they are often out of the public eye. This makes it especially important to concentrate more research on this type of organization.

Non-Governmental Organizations in Peace Work

Peace NGOs involved in global networks develop “value communities” to pursue objectives in a culturally transcendent way (Muller 1998). For example, while human rights organizations may differ in the importance they place on individual and collective political and social rights, they all demand *habeas corpus* rights. Consensus concerning core rights and objectives that are jointly pursued is the first element needed for the emergence of such a value community. The second element is rooted in practice. NGOs hold to the principle that ordinary citizens, and not only official power holders, have the right to act for public issues. This orientation cuts across specific political preferences, transcending the cultural differences between them. The third element is the pursuit of intercultural dialogue, which is necessary for successful networking, which can create a common reference system and a basis for discourse from the different groups' value repertoires.

These elements show that people are able to adjust values, perceptions and language from different environments and historical experiences, and to overcome cultural and ethno-specific images of the “enemy”. This is necessary if NGOs are to play a role in peace building (Lane 1995) and in the development of a “culture of peace” - a value orientation and practice of dialogue directed towards bridging gaps (Ropers 1995). NGOs can help conflicting parties by serving in a mediating function. This is especially important when the actors are either unable or unwilling to engage in dialogue, often the case in acute phases of a conflict (Weiss & Nazarenko 1996). NGOs that develop in societies ripped by conflict often try to first cooperate with NGOs from the other side, and then bring back their experiences to their own societies (Lederach 1994).

In different phases of violent conflicts, NGOs engage in other kinds of activity (Weiss & Nazarenko 1996). During the acute phase of a conflict, NGOs usually pressure political leaderships to end the violence, to enter into negotiations, and counter lack of connections on the political level with the beginnings of a social dialogue. During the peace-building phase, NGOs try to increase their societies' abilities for peace and to strengthen dialogue with the conflict partner. This is difficult since cooperation entails coping with obstacles such as: cultural differences between the partners and different delimiting identities rooted in contrary narratives of the conflict and its history (Faure & Rubin 1993; Wedge 1986); asymmetric relations between the partners with regard to power, competence and resources; security problems facing both sides (Posen 1993); and calculations of costs and benefits unfavourable for cooperation (Holl 1993).

An example of how NGOs can aid peace-building efforts in a society recovering from an ethnic conflict comes from the case of Bosnia – Herzegovina. Gagnon (1998) reports that international and local NGOs have used four strategies to work toward the prevention of further violence: changing the political structures and institutions of the society; party building and civic education; building local non-political party NGO capacity; and

reconstruction and development as a means of strengthening the community and civil society. He also notes that more successes occurred when international NGOs funded activities developed by local NGOs that reflected the people's real needs and concerns. However, Demichilis (1998), who also studied NGOs in Bosnia-Herzegovina, reported that international NGOs often failed in their work, due to their tendency to become embroiled in local politics, their constant advertisement of their work – which often caused bad feelings among the population who felt that reconstruction of their society was being taken out of their hands and orchestrated by international organizations – and due to competition among the organizations to be “number one.” Demichilis notes that for NGOs to be successful, there is a need for a concerted coordination of activities, and that they must support local NGOs and people so they will be able to continue with the work once the internationals have gone home.

There are other ways in which NGOs can also help in peace-building work. NGOs working toward dialogue enhancement can engage in conflict management and in joint social projects to demonstrate the material benefits of peace to society and to change its calculations of benefits (Weiss & Nazarenko 1996). As soon as the conflict partner is no longer perceived as a threat, but rather as a partner with common interests, peace becomes attractive. This enlarges the “Peace Constituency” (Lederach 1995) - the circle of those who support peace. This strategy, which makes it easier for the sides to reconcile their interests (Senghass 1992), parallels knowledge gained from mediation research that has shown that it is important to distinguish between positions that are often tied to identities and interests in a conflict.

However, scholars/practitioners are not in complete agreement on whether separation is possible when it comes to issues of one's identity. This is because one's identity is seen as being deeply connected to the relationship that exists between partners. As a result, some researchers aver that issues of identity cannot be marginalized; they must be tackled (Bar-On 2000 a). This is especially true of the Palestinian - Israeli case, since the identities of the two peoples are interdependent; neither side appears able to define its own separate identity without relating to the “enemy” (Kelman 1999).

The centrality of addressing issues of identity when undertaking peace work crucial to any approach we take. We believe that groups involved in a protracted and violent conflict that decide to enter into cooperation for their mutual benefit need to devote part of the time to a dialogue about their relationships. The repression of different experiences and points of view may pose a latent danger and destroy cooperation during critical points of the project (Francis & Ropers 1997).

Non-governmental organizations in peace projects in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict

NGO peace work in the Palestinian Authority (PNA) and Israel has taken two forms: (a) the “peace movement”, whose activities are directly related to peace seeking, and (b) joint, practice-oriented projects in different social realms that pursue peace through indirect means. Before the Oslo agreements, NGOs tended to initiate contacts across the conflict line and exert pressure on their governments to begin negotiations. In the next stage, NGOs continued to act as pressure groups during the often-difficult peace process. However, it became more important for them to help prepare their societies for peaceful coexistence and mutual co-operation (Zartman 1998).

At a conference, organized by PRIME in 1999, over 40 Israeli and Palestinian NGOs convened, some of which had been involved in cooperative projects (Adwan & Bar-On 2000; Maoz 2000a). While most of these NGOs were working solely within their own societies, they showed willingness for cooperation. The NGOs that were engaged in cooperative projects were working in the educational, economic, human rights, and health, social, and environmental policy realms.

Adwan & Bar-On (2000) noted results in joint economic and political work that the cardinal problem was found to be the asymmetrical relations between the groups. Asymmetry between the NGOs, which reflects the distribution of power in the Israeli-Palestinian context, was evaluated by examining levels of experience within the organizations, degree of professionalism, availability of resources, and the degree to which organizations are embedded in a developed civil society (for a discussion of asymmetry, see Maoz 2000b, in press). The Israeli partners were found to have the advantage in all of these respects.

A second difficulty found in the joint work was rooted in the bad relations that have often existed between the two peoples. In joint projects, the Palestinian participants tended to focus on the low regard with which the Israelis often treat their people, and to make this the central issue during their work. This behavior often caused the Israeli side to become defensive, and as a result, the actual topic of cooperation often got lost.

The third problem concerned language. Since, in general, the Israelis and Palestinians do not know one another’s language, English remains the working language. Here the Israelis also tend to have the advantage, increasing asymmetric relations. Hidden behind this inability to speak the other’s language was a fourth problem, a deeper one of cultural differences. Israelis tend to be less aware of cultural differences than the Palestinians, and this ignorance causes them to make mistakes in joint projects, such as not being sensitive to Palestinian cultural norms concerning proper male – female public interaction. This has led to more misunderstandings and bad feelings.

The fifth problem concerning joint work was the Palestinians’ limited freedom of movement due to security measures imposed by the Israeli

government and military. This was connected to the difficult problem of disengaging the political disturbances from the joint work.

Based on the above knowledge, PRIME undertook a pilot study of Palestinian and Israeli environmental NGOs. We chose to focus on environmental NGOs since joint ecology work was seen as promising for peace building due to its ability to be a border-transcending objective for both Palestinians and Israelis. A second reason is connected to the ecological conditions of the region: the land is densely populated, semiarid, suffers from a water shortage, and has problematic waste management and sewage systems. In addition, although levels of development in Israel and in the PNA differ, intensive agriculture and industrial development have damaged the environment. From a theoretical point of view, we hoped that this study would lead to information important for civil society actors involved in the peace process. From a practical point of view, we assumed that if we found the environmental NGOs successful in their joint work, this could lead to the development of a culture of peace between Israelis and Palestinians.

Due to limitations of space, we will focus here on NGOs that have worked on collaborative projects. We looked at their reasons for doing so, their understandings of the connection between the state of the environment and the Palestinian-Israeli conflict and the peace process, and obstacles encountered in this work.

Method

In April 2000, we convened to plan the study. The research methods changed over time for two main reasons. First, as we gathered information, we learned which organizations were worthwhile to interview and how to better go about collecting the information we were interested in. More importantly, the outbreak of the Intifada made further data collection impossible, and made our regular joint staff meetings, almost an impossibility.

The Sample

The Joint Sample: We interviewed the three jointly run Palestinian-Israeli NGOs that deal with the environment. These included IPCRI – The Israel Palestine Center for Research and Information, FoEME – Friends of the Earth Middle East and PIES – Palestinian Israeli Environmental Secretariat.

The Palestinian Sample: Representatives from thirty-seven Palestinian NGOs from the Gaza Strip and the West Bank, including Jerusalem, were interviewed face-to-face, in their offices, and/or by telephone. The Palestinian team obtained a list of environmental NGOs from the Ministry of Planning and International Cooperation. During the interviews, the team asked their interviewees to suggest additional names of NGOs for interviewing. The Palestinian environmental NGOs were categorized accordingly:

- Organizations that have cooperated with Israeli NGOs.
- Organizations not-yet cooperating with Israeli NGOs, but willing to cooperate.
- Organizations unwilling to cooperate with the Israeli side in the meantime or in the near future.

Results from the 12 NGOs that have cooperated with Israeli partners, and that agreed to be written about, are presented here.

The Israeli Sample: In the overall Israeli sample, 19 NGOs, two academic institutions, and one Government Organization (*The Parks Authority* – interviewed due to its cooperative work with Palestinian partners) gave face-to-face, tape-recorded interviews. The criteria for choosing the organizations to be interviewed in depth were:

- a) The organization engaged in cooperative work with Palestinians.
- b) Other NGOs considered them important in the Israeli environmental context.
- c) The organization had been in existence for many years and/or was well known in Israel for its work.
- d) The NGO focused on different issues and/or different populations.

Most of the interviews were held in the offices of the organizations, but three took place in cafes (at the requests of the interviewees). Two key Israeli environmentalists were also interviewed to get an overall picture of the Israeli environmental movement. While the Israeli team conducted short interviews with an additional 10 organizations by telephone or electronic means, these NGOs are not presented here. This paper presents results on the 16 NGOs that have engaged in cooperative work. The joint organizations that were interviewed are presented in Table 1, the Palestinian NGOs are presented in Table 2 and the Israeli organizations are presented in Table 3.

Instruments:

Data Collection: To learn about the NGOs, we formulated an interview guide (see Table 4 for the questions posed to NGOs that engaged in joint work). While we usually succeeded in covering the issues in the guide, it was not always possible to do so, due to time limitations and/or requests of the participants to talk about topics they deemed important. In general, after explaining the study, the interviewers let the NGO representatives talk freely. Questions were asked when the interviewee brought up a subject, or at the end, if the questions had not been addressed. At the end of the interviews, participants were asked if they had any suggestions concerning people/organizations to interview. On the Palestinian side, the interviews were conducted in Arabic. On the Israeli side, 17 interviews were conducted in Hebrew and 5 in English. Both teams also learned about the NGOs by collecting written materials and publications from the organizations and by exploring their websites. These materials provided a “public” window into

the organization, and their utilization often saved time during the interview. The interviews lasted between 45 minutes and four hours.

Data Analysis and Procedure: First, each team mapped the environmental NGOs in their societies (finding there to be approximately 100 on each side). We compiled our lists by using Internet searches, talking to umbrella organizations and the ministries of environment, and by getting information from environmentalists. Acting on this information, we then decided to carry out in-depth interviews with the jointly run NGOs and with approximately 40 organizations altogether (an equal number on each side). Although we used the interview guide developed for the study, we did not always receive answers to our questions about specifics of their joint activities. We attribute this to two main reasons. First, the NGO representatives, who were limited in the amount of time they could devote to the interview, wanted to present certain information about their organizations. We were consistently respectful of this request. Second, we were dealing with sensitive matters; if we did not receive detailed information about joint activities, we did not pressure the representatives to answer because we did not want them to feel that we were being critical of their work. Based on the interviewees' tendencies to talk in generalities, we planned to do some joint observations of NGOs engaged in cooperative activities to see for ourselves what these projects looked like.

The teams gathered their information separately, meeting together every few weeks to exchange ideas and summaries of the interviews that had been prepared in English so all staff members could read them. These summaries included the interview conversation plus information about the NGO garnered from the organizations' websites and/or publications. While these were not word-for-word transcripts, they were quite extensive and often contained direct quotes. This stage continued through September, 2000. When the Intifada began at the end of that month, further data collection, including our planned joint observations, became impossible.

After a month into the violence, when it became clear that there was not going to be a quick resolution of the conflict and that we could no longer continue on as planned, we decided that each team would analyze what they had managed to collect. As a result, the analysis processes were not identical for the two teams. While this was far from optimal, we believed that it was important to complete what we could. Even though we worked separately, we kept up some telephone and e-mail contact, sending our analyses to all team members for review and comment. We also succeeded in meeting twice in Jerusalem, since traveling to PRIME's offices in Beit Jala was too dangerous.

Despite the differences in data analysis, each side wrote a one-page summary of each NGO, and compiled tables with descriptive information about the organizations. Each team also wrote a summary report of the NGOs it had interviewed, based on answers to the questions that the NGO representatives had given during the interview and on the information that we

had collected from their websites and publications. We also did more analytical work, trying to understand the NGOs' views on the roles of their organizations within their societies, their perceptions of the "other", and other issues related to the success or failure of their environmental – peace work (Adwan & Bar-On 2000).

In this paper, we focus on organizations that had engaged in cooperation. Using the sources of data collection noted above, we present the foci of their work, target populations, scope of activities and major projects, reasons for engaging in cooperative work, obstacles encountered in this joint work, perceptions of the state of the environment and its association to the ongoing conflict, and their perception of the influence of the peace agreement on the environment.

Results

We will begin with the jointly run NGOs, and then move on to the Palestinian and the Israeli NGOs. Due to the current very sensitive political situation in Israel/PNA, we will present the Palestinian and the Israeli results without identifying which specific NGOs made specific comments.

An Overview of Jointly Run NGOs (presented alphabetically) Friends of the Earth Middle East (FoEME)

In our study, a number of interviewees from both sides stated that this organization was an important link for NGOs who wanted to work on joint projects. Since its inception in 1994, FoEME, an umbrella organization for environmental NGOs in the PNA, Israel, Egypt and Jordan, has focused on many environmental issues, all chosen jointly by their Middle Eastern partners. These projects are seen as having a social and economic impact for people of the region, reflecting FoEME's manifest holistic view of the environment. This perspective was evident from their stated objectives, from their project diversity that aimed at improving the quality of the environment for different populations in the different countries, and from their extensive international networking. From the analysis of the interview, and from what was learned about FoEME from other environmentalists, FoEME appeared to be a creative organization in that it used a variety of methods and projects to further peace and help preserve the environment. We also found FoEME to have numerous links with government institutions, with organizations in all member countries, with universities and research centers, and with international NGOs. When our informants spoke of FoEME, they mentioned respect for their work and high level of professionalism.

FoEME has reached marginal populations to enhance capacity building, and the NGO appeared to be sensitive to their needs. An example of this type of work was their Renewable Energy Demonstration Program, a solar energy feasibility study that aimed at promoting sustainable communities by creating a "solar bridge for peace building" that would help develop clean energy for

domestic purposes, industrial needs and for water pumping. To reach different communities, FoEME established installations in Palestinian, Jordanian and Egyptian villages and in an Israeli kibbutz.

FoEME aimed to change the political status quo and to empower the Palestinians, as well as to strengthen the peace between Israel and Jordan, and Egypt. Evidence of this comes from their projects which took into account the needs of the member states such as their large scale Dead Sea Basin project and their study of the environmental impact that the Mediterranean Free Trade Zone (MFTZ) would have on the region.

Israeli-Palestine Center for Research and Information (IPCRI)

IPCRI, a jointly run Palestinian-Israeli policy-making think tank that was established in 1989, has focused on environmental as well as social issues, seeing the two realms as connected to one another. This is evident in that the environmental section is one of 5 departments that work on a number of social and political issues. Environmental issues are selected on the basis of their perceived importance to both Palestinians and Israelis. Programs have developed based on information gained at three “Shared Environment” conferences, which were held between 1994 – 1996, in which Palestinian and Israeli environmentalists discussed issues such as water management, industrialization, hospital waste management, agricultural trade and management of open spaces.

An example of a creative project that meshes with the overall goals of IPCRI is their environmental resolution-mediation program. This program, during the year and half of violence, managed to bring the participants from both sides together at one meeting in Turkey, and is currently jointly training Israelis and Palestinians to become arbitrators in environmental conflicts. IPCRI’s environmental section also works at reaching populations that tend to be marginalized to enhance capacity building. For example, they are working on involving women’s groups in environmental work and they are training Palestinians to become environmental professionals.

IPCRI has always proclaimed that it aims to change the political status quo and to empower the Palestinians. To achieve this goal, they devote much of their time trying to influence decision-makers on both sides to work toward peaceful resolution of the conflict. Based on statements made by Israeli and Palestinian environmentalists, IPCRI is very well respected and perceived as experts at their work.

Palestinian-Israeli Environmental Secretariat (PIES)

Until the outbreak of violence, PIES dealt with issues that encompassed environmental and social components. Since their establishment in 1997, they developed over 20 programs – although not all of them received funding. Much of their work has been in education with student groups, summer camps, youth groups and school projects. However PIES has not limited itself to educational work; it also helped bring together Palestinian and Israeli businessmen to learn and implement ISO 14001 – internationally, environmentally safe production standards. PIES also instigated a

Palestinian – Israeli team to work on environmental policy initiatives that hopes one day to present their findings to decision-makers in both Israeli and Palestinian governments.

Based on information from other environmentalists and from PIES itself, we understood that, at times, the organizations experienced some difficulties in implementing their work. The reason for this appears to be tied to their relative inexperience: PIES is a younger organization – both organizationally and in the environmental field – than IPCRI and FoEME. PIES' activities appear to be aimed at changing the status quo and at empowering the Palestinians. As in the above cases, other environmentalists noted their respect of PIES, stating that they did important work and that they were helpful in establishing contacts between environmental groups from the two societies.

The Effect of the Al Aqsa Intifada on the Joint NGOs

After the eruption of the Al Aqsa Intifada, we contacted the jointly run NGOs to see if they were still continuing their work. We learned that the FoEME office in East Jerusalem closed soon after the start of the Intifada, while their office in Amman remained in full operation. After the staff worked from their homes for a while, they opened two offices in Tel-Aviv and Bethlehem and hired additional staff for their offices and their fieldwork – comprised of equal numbers of Palestinians and Israelis. Their experts from both sides continue to meet, with more public events taking place in parallel fashion. IPCRI continued its work to keep dialogue open between the Palestinians and the Israelis. Like FoEME, they too had to relocate their offices from war-torn Bethlehem, and moved temporarily to safer Jerusalem. In the beginning, the political situation made it impossible for joint environmental projects to proceed. However, as IPCRI adjusted itself to the new situation, they began to implement some projects, most notably their training of environmental mediators. Concerning PIES, we were informed that this NGO could not carry out their planned activities after the Intifada began, and that the Israeli director left the organization in February 2001 "...since there was no work..." However, the Palestinian director of PIES has remained with the organization and keeps in periodic contact with Israeli colleagues from environmental NGOs.

In summation, then, these jointly run NGOs were, on the whole, seen by Israeli and Palestinian environmentalists as being important players in the cooperative world. They aimed to change asymmetrical relations between the Israelis and Palestinians by working on a number of issues, with different populations, including marginal ones. However, the Al Aqsa Intifada had a major impact on the ways in which they could work. Offices had to be relocated, work often had to be done in parallel fashion, and there were changes in personnel. After the initial breakdown of peace talks and outbreak of violence, FoEME and IPCRI managed to continue on with their work to some degree, perhaps due to their ability to maintain their links with their

Palestinian and Israeli colleagues, their international contacts, and their diversity in activities.

Overview of the Cooperating Palestinian Environmental NGOs

Twelve NGOs that participated in joint work agreed to be included in this study. The oldest of these organizations was established in the fifties, but most were founded in the late eighties and nineties. These NGOs focus on a number of areas including: protection of environment and water resources; development of educational and training programs and programs for environmental awareness; clean-up campaigns, tree planting; development of the rural and agricultural sector; scientific studies of water, soil and energy; conservation of wildlife; and consultation services and lobbying. All of the NGOs stated that the biggest environmental problem for the Palestinians was water. This was seen as being tied to Israeli control of the water resources, preventing the conducting of adequate studies to diagnose specific problems and find feasible solutions. The NGOs targeted different groups: farmers and rural populations, children, women, and decision makers. All 12 of the Palestinian NGOs have cooperated on projects with the Israelis on the national level as well as on local ones, and three of these NGOs have ties to international organizations.

When representatives from the Palestinian NGOs that had engaged in joint work with Israeli environmentalists were asked why they did so, they all stated that such work was necessary for protection of the environment and for exchange of important ecological information. The conditions most often stated as being important for engaging in joint work with Israelis included: the Palestinians must be treated as peers; the project must meet the needs of both sides; the Israeli partners are expected to state that they are against settlements in the occupied territories and Israeli sovereignty over Jerusalem; the Israelis must commit themselves to providing the Palestinians with environmental facts about Israel; the project is suitable for the current situation; and that the Israeli partners are able to demonstrate an ability to solve environmental problems. The NGOs in our study stated that, for the most part, they saw the experience as being positive and that it met the needs of both sides.

When asked whether the conflict had hurt the environment, the Palestinian representatives unanimously answered yes. A number of Israeli practices were noted as having harmed the environment. All of the NGOs stated that confiscation of Palestinian land for Jewish settlements was a major contributor to the deterioration of the environment. Since the 1967 war, all successive Israeli governments have either confiscated, or declared as closed areas, land in the West Bank and in the Gaza Strip. The organizations remarked that Israeli settlements in the PNA have also led to the demolition of houses, uprooting of thousands of trees and construction of numerous by-pass roads, for the sole use of Israeli settlers to link them to one

another while avoiding contact with the Palestinians. These practices have fragmented both Palestinian land and people, leading to overcrowding of urban areas and loss of open space.

A second negative effect of the conflict, noted by 9 of the NGOs, is the depletion of water resources, such as over pumping of the Gaza coastal aquifer, redirection of the Jordan River, and the transportation of water from one water basin to another. Palestinian interviewees stated that while the Israelis are digging new wells, Palestinians are blocked from using existing ones and only have access to 15 percent of the water.

Pollution was the third problem cited by all of the NGOs. Eight NGOs noted that wastewater from at least 9 Israeli settlements had been discharged to the nearby valleys without treatment, with 11 Palestinian localities being harmed by these actions. Three NGOs stated that they knew of at least two Israeli settlements that released its sewage and chemical waste from industrial plants into Palestinian valleys in both the West Bank and the Gaza Strip and that solid waste from Israelis was being dumped on Palestinian land, fields, and roads. Seven representatives from the Palestinian NGOs stated that the Israeli government had constructed at least seven industrial zones in the West Bank, which often result in the flow of industrial wastewater into adjacent Palestinian lands. They noted that industrial solid, and often hazardous, waste generated by these factories is often collected and dumped in areas near Palestinian villages.

Deforestation and uprooting of trees was another consequence of the conflict noted by 10 of the Palestinian interviewees. They said that a great percentage of forests had been cut down in the territories, usually as a consequence of Israeli establishment of military bases, settlements, and bypass roads. Four of our interviewees spoke about military practices in the agricultural areas inside Palestine and the destruction of agricultural lands, especially during the crop and harvesting seasons, which were also cited as a problem. The lack of an environmental infrastructure in the Palestinian lands was noted by three of the NGOs as one of the major consequences of the conflict. No sanitary systems, wastewater treatment systems, or sewage systems were built during the 30 years of occupation.

The Palestinian environmental NGOs unanimously asserted that a comprehensive peace process would help in bringing about a change for the better in the environment. However, 7 of the 12 organizations stated that the Oslo peace process had not helped this process. Six noted that it was not the current peace process, per se, that had had a positive effect on the environment, but rather the establishment of the PA that had been a result of the process. The reason given for the failure of the Oslo peace process to strengthen the environment was that during the period of interim agreements, the Palestinians saw the establishment of new Jewish settlements on their lands, and a continuation of the Israeli negative practices against the Palestinian environment. The Palestinian informants stated that they felt that the Israelis were not living up to the peace agreement commitments.

However, all of the NGOs agreed that a comprehensive peace would create trust for joint projects, and that these projects could be an instrument for the enhancement of peace.

Overview of the Israeli Environmental NGOs

All but one of the 16 Israeli NGOs that engaged in cooperative work with Palestinian partners were founded in the 1990s, most after the onset of the Oslo peace process. The organizations differed in size, scope, membership, and issues that they address, targeting many different populations such as children of all ages, students, minorities (such as Bedouin and Arab citizens of Israel and Palestinians from the occupied territories), and business people. The activities most often undertaken by these organizations center on: protection of beaches; sustainable development; management of water resources; empowerment of Palestinian populations; activities against the construction of the Trans-Israel highway; environmental awareness and educational programs; training programs for environmental professionals; activism; activities for business people; and studies of wildlife, desertification, water, pollutants, and health issues. All of the NGOs in this sub-sample engaged in networking on the international level. The critical environmental problems noted by these Israeli organizations included water quality and shortage, sustainable development, and public transportation. The NGOs cited two main problems: the importance of widening the circle of activists for the environment and of having more success at influencing policy makers.

When the Israeli representatives talked about their willingness to cooperate with Palestinian partners, 6 of the organizations stated that cooperative work was a major focus of their work, seeing it as important for achievement of peace and a cleaner environment. Eleven NGOs said that they see environmental protection as even more important than cooperation with the Palestinians, even though they did also highly value cooperative work. Therefore, when problems arise during cooperation, if these problems interfere with the environmental work, taking care for the environment should take precedence over carrying on the collaborative projects.

All of the Israeli NGOs that stressed cooperation as the main focus of their work noted that they see the Palestinian partners as their peers and that it is important that the project meets the needs of both sides. These organizations appeared to be attuned to the asymmetric power relations that exist between the Israelis and the Palestinians and they stated that they tried to create equal relations in their work. Palestinian problems were seen as being Israeli problems; for example, 5 of the NGOs stated that when their Palestinian partners had trouble getting permission from the border police to enter Israel, the Israeli partners would personally intervene to get that permission. The 10 NGOs that had engaged in cooperative projects, but that did not view these activities as being essential to their work, differed from the 6 NGOs that did,

in that they generally did not appear to be as aware that asymmetry between the Israelis and the Palestinians could explain why joint work was so difficult at times.

The representatives from the 6 Israeli NGOs who said that cooperative work was one of their major aims also noted their sensitivity to the political situation, acting in ways that suited the political climate. Fifteen of the 16 NGOs evaluated this work as being mostly positive. They noted the importance of having and keeping up personal contacts. However, the interviewees stated that while there was an opening up of dialogue between the Israelis and Palestinians during the projects, they did not believe that enough real progress in solving environmental problems was being made.

All of the cooperating NGOs agreed that there is a connection between the Palestinian-Israeli conflict and the damage that has been caused to the environment. However, none of the organizations saw the conflict as being the main reason for neglect. Eleven interviewees stated that Israelis tend to have such low regard and understanding for potential environmental dangers that even if there was no conflict, Israel would not be in a much different place environmentally than where it is today. While the conflict, therefore, was definitely seen as having a negative impact on the ecology, it could not carry the primary blame for environmental problems faced by Israel and Palestine today.

There were a number of reasons given for the connection between the conflict and the negative impact on the environment. These reasons included the Israeli governments' overriding concern with problems of security over other social issues (noted by 6 organizations). This means that much money has gone to defence instead of to other purposes – including environmental issues. Four NGOs stated that the military has also caused damage, both in Israel and in the PNA, for example, when the IDF has uprooted trees in the territories in the name of security, or has left potentially toxic waste in open areas. Four NGOs also noted that expansion of settlements was detrimental to the shared environment; nature has been destroyed to build houses and roads that circumvent Palestinian villages. Water has also been poorly managed, often leaving Palestinians without enough good water while the Israeli government overextends the water supply in the settlements. Another reason given for disregard and/or damaging of the environment, which was noted by 11 NGOs, was unchecked “modern” development, which did not take the needs of the environment into consideration.

The Israeli representatives from the NGOs were asked how they thought a peace agreement would affect the environment. Six organizations believed that it would have both a positive and negative effect, 6 believed that it would positively help and four stated that they believed that a peace agreement could lead to further deterioration. This was based on the belief that a peace agreement would bring about more unchecked development, such as an increase in private cars that would travel between both countries,

causing increased air pollution, and an expansion of environmentally bad joint industries.

Obstacles Encountered in Joint Work

Obstacles Encountered by the Palestinians

Despite the overall positive evaluation, the NGOs stated that they did face obstacles in their joint work. According to the Palestinian interviewees, these included: lack of real dialogue between the sides; cultural differences; political disturbances, which often affected their freedom of movement; lack of information from Israelis concerning environmental problems within Israeli borders; attitudes toward publicizing of activities; and, finally, psychological problems.

When speaking about dialogue problems, 9 cooperating Palestinian NGOs noted that they often felt that each side “had its own agenda”, especially when working on applied studies. As a result, each side worked according to its own schedule and plans, basically only meeting at the end, in order to combine their data. This kind of working relationship often resulted in an imbalance not only in the work patterns, but also, in turn, in the final project results.

Another difficulty encountered in joint work was termed cultural differences, especially problematic in environmental summer camps held for Israeli and Palestinian youth, in which teenage boys and girls interacted with one another. The spokespeople for three of the Palestinian NGOs noted that Palestinian society tends to be conservative, and this is not always the case with Israeli society. For the Palestinians, the Israeli girl and boy adolescents appeared to be more open in their behavior with one another, than is normative for the Palestinians, engaging, at times, in practices that are considered to be shameful, prohibited and /or unacceptable in their society and culture. The Palestinian interviewees who had this experience felt that the Israelis were insensitive to this cultural difference, and that this caused an undercurrent of problems during the joint activities.

Five NGOs noted that political disturbances, closure of PNA areas, and outbreaks of the conflict negatively affected the cooperative projects in two main ways: the Israeli authorities often limited the Palestinians’ freedom of movement and the Palestinian Authority often issued directives to the Palestinian NGOs to cease joint work with the Israelis until the tense and violent period had passed. Another obstacle to be overcome was lack of information. One Palestinian NGO stated that they had problems completing their projects since they felt that the Israelis were not always forthright concerning environmental facts within Israel. This lack of information prevented them from carrying out their work in a manner they believed would truly benefit the environment.

A differing perspective on the publicizing of joint projects was yet another obstacle mentioned by most of the cooperating Palestinian NGOs. Ten NGOs

said that they saw the Israelis as being interested in publicizing joint projects in order to show the world that the two sides were cooperating, even during tense political times. In doing so, the Palestinian NGOs, in this study, stated that they thought that the Israelis were trying to influence international opinion, and at times, they found this disturbing.

Finally, 10 of the Palestinian interviewees noted that there were psychological obstacles that needed to be overcome. They stated that the years of occupation have made it very difficult for them to see the Israelis as anything else but occupiers and confiscators of their land, and demolishers of houses. Therefore, they believed that it would take time before they could truly see them in a different light and that while it was important for the Israelis to understand this, they did not appear to be sensitive to this issue.

Obstacles Encountered by the Israelis

The obstacles to joint work mentioned by the Israeli NGOs included: political disturbances and problems with freedom of movement for the Palestinians, security measures which negatively affected the smooth running of activities, problems around “talking environment” or “talking conflict”, language barriers, instability in keeping up long-term partnerships, and different cultural norms when it came to taking action.

Eleven of the cooperating Israeli NGOs noted that upsurges of violence between the Palestinians and the Israelis often disrupted their work. This would lead to closures or curfews of PNA areas, and to a restriction in movement for the Palestinian partners, either because the Israeli military would not let them pass or because PNA officials issued orders to the NGOs to desist working with Israelis. When freedom of movement was obstructed, Israeli representatives said that they often intervened personally at the borders, in order to get military permission for their partners to enter Israel. During very violent times, activities were postponed or cancelled – either because the Palestinian partners were unwilling or unable to participate. Three NGOs also noted that venues of conferences were changed to neutral regions (e.g., Turkey) in order to solve this problem.

Tied to the first problem is the general issue of security. Eight of our Israeli informants told us that, at times, activities had to be planned and re-planned in order to meet security demands set forth by Israeli authorities and requirements of Palestinian and Israeli organizations involved in the activities. This problem was especially acute when children were involved; given security measures, it was often very difficult to find a venue for group activities that would be acceptable and suitable for the activities planned.

A more serious obstacle to undertaking joint activities was the issue of content of the meetings. Seven of the Israeli NGOs felt that the Palestinians were often more interested in talking about the conflict, stressing Israel’s responsibility for infringement of their human and civil rights, than on the environment – the manifest reason for meeting. While the environmentalists understood this need on the part of the Palestinians, seeing the importance of

dedicating part of their time together to discussing these issues, they felt that this had the effect of limiting the amount of real work on the environment that needed to be done, and that, at times, also put them on the defensive.

A language barrier was another obstacle mentioned by 5 of the organizations. Most of the activities had to be conducted in English in order to make communication possible. This proved to be very difficult when the activities centered on children or people who came from rural areas and/or had limited formal education. Often the participants would speak through a translator, which slowed down the process and made cross communication extremely difficult. This often led to participants working side-by-side, rather than together on a given project. Three of the Israeli interviewees also noted that an additional obstacle to joint work was that the Palestinian partners often changed on them. For example, they would hold one seminar, and when they met again to continue their work, a new group of Palestinian participants would come to the meeting. This lack of continuity was cited as limiting environmental progress.

The last obstacle, noted by 5 of our Israeli interviewees, was the difference in norms accepted by the Israelis and those accepted by Palestinians concerning the role of NGOs in civil society. While the Israelis tended to see themselves as willing to partake in “civil disobedience” and to protest government actions and policies detrimental to the environment, they mentioned that the Palestinians tended to “toe the PNA government line” – behavior that they found to be at odds with the essence of NGO work. While some of the Israeli participants understood that the Palestinians’ political and social situation did not permit them to be as outspoken as they could, at times – even noting that this had been the case for Israelis in the early days of statehood – they felt that this behavior kept the parties from undertaking the environmental work they had set out to do.

Discussion and Conclusions

We embarked on our study of environmental NGOs in Israeli and the PNA in order to learn not only what issues interest regional environmentalists, and how they deal with them, but also to learn how their work relates to the conflict and peace building efforts. The renewal of violence between the sides prevented us from completing our data collection and analysis as we would have liked, leaving many questions unanswered. In spite of this, we see a number of points and tentative conclusions that can be put forth.

To begin with, it is fair to say that the environment has become an important issue for civil actors in both societies. This has led to the establishment of many NGOs on each side, many since the mid 1990s, when the Oslo peace process opened the door for many new ventures. We found that the sides agree, that for too many years, significant damage has been done to the environment and that immediate steps must be taken to forcibly address these issues. Furthermore, there is also consensus among these

NGOs that the issues that affect one country affect the other. Therefore, sharing of knowledge and pooling of resources is needed, to at least some extent, if the problems are to be solved. This assumption, reminiscent of the claim made by Holl (1993) and the UNESCO reports (1998) concerning the benefit of pursuing joint goals, as opposed to unilateral interests, made it possible for Israeli and Palestinian NGOs to work together on a variety of projects that reached a variety of populations.

In spite of the agreement that the environment needs serious looking after, the Israeli and Palestinian NGOs, which were presented in this paper, did not wholly agree on the sources of the ecological deterioration, or on the ways that this deterioration could be stopped, including their part in these efforts. While the Palestinian NGOs did not believe that it is possible to disengage the conflict and the state of the environment from one another, the Israeli environmentalists did not always hold this view. These differences in perception have led to different explanations concerning the roots of environmental deterioration, the willingness to work with the other side on joint environmental projects, the obstacles to be overcome in joint work, and the connection between resolution of the conflict and improvement of the environment. We also experienced the consequences of these differences firsthand as we worked on our study. For example, the Palestinian team was confronted with over 10 NGOs that refused to participate in our study when they were told that it was a joint Israeli – Palestinian venture. They stated that participation would legitimize the asymmetric relationships between the two peoples, something that they were not yet prepared to do. Furthermore, after the onset of the Al Aqsa Intifada, *none* of the Palestinian NGOs that had participated in our study agreed to provide any more information. While the Israeli team did not succeed in securing interviews with all of the NGOs that it approached, these were never the reasons given for non-participation, neither before nor during the Al Aqsa Intifada.

Perceptions of environmental issues are reminiscent of other issues connected to the Israeli – Palestinian conflict. Scholars, working from a variety of disciplines on the conflict (e.g. Adwan & Firer 2000; Bar-On 2000b; Bickerton & Klausner 2002; Kelman 1999; Said 1990), have noted that the Palestinian and Israeli narratives concerning the history of the region, legitimate claims to the land, roots of the conflict and the reasons for its insolvability are diametrically opposed to one another. As a result of these opposite perceptions, Palestinian environmentalists see the Israeli occupation of Palestinian lands, and their general disregard for the Palestinian people, as being *the* reasons that so much damage has been caused to the environment, whereas Israeli environmentalists see deterioration of the environment as being a result of general ignorance, disregard and low priorities on the part of state institutions.

This difference in understanding does not remain solely on the theoretical level, but affects the practical level as well. Cooperating Palestinian NGOs do not see the point of “talking environment” without “talking occupation”.

The Israelis, however, tend to see “talking conflict” as a detour from “talking environment.” In our opinion, these differences not only reflect problems in communication between the two sides but also reflect the asymmetric power relationships that exist between the Palestinians and the Israelis (Gidron & Katz 1998; Rouhana & Kelman 1994; Suleiman 1997) and can be explained in the following way.

When the organizations were engaged in their joint work, during the last years of the 1990s, the Israeli NGOs enjoyed a social-political context very different from that of their Palestinian counterparts. They had emerged from, and were embedded in, a developed civil society that had a stable economy and an established infrastructure. Furthermore, Israel still retained a great degree of military and civil control over Palestinian people and lands. The social environment was different for the Palestinian NGOs, however; the PNA was in the throes of nation building, it had just begun to build its infrastructure and much of its land, peoples and institutions were still under Israeli occupation. Of the two sides, the Israeli NGOs were clearly the dominant party and, at times, some of them appeared to be oblivious to the life conditions of their Palestinian partners. Therefore, it is not surprising to learn that during cooperative projects, the sides often held different conceptions of “reality”, especially concerning whether or not the conflict was nearing its end, and how they should go about their joint work. This can help account for the tendency of the Israeli NGOs to perceive the conflict as near its end, almost part of the past, and for their desire to address other issues, such as the environment, that had been overlooked for years, without dwelling on the occupation. On the Palestinian side, however, the organizations still saw their societies as being embroiled in the conflict, with its end still out of reach. Therefore, they tended to object to Israeli NGO behavior that appeared to them to be trivialization and/or ignoring of problems of oppression and inequality that still affected their everyday lives and did not see the point in talking about improving the environment that without discussing the continuing occupation.

This asymmetry in beliefs, practices, and realities can help explain why the Israelis were unable, at times, to understand the importance of making time for the Palestinians to openly talk about their negative feelings and experiences that they encountered over the years of occupation (Shikaki 1998). In addition, we believe that the differences mirrored great unease, on the part of the Israeli environmentalists, when Palestinian partners accused Israelis of having purposely harmed the Palestinian environment. Therefore, while we believe that the reasons given by the Israeli NGOs for the poor state of the environment definitely capture many truisms, their relative minimization of the effects of the conflict on the environment may be a defense mechanism that they employed when confronted with the Palestinian allegations.

As Gidron and Katz found in their 1998 study, the Palestinian environmental NGOs interviewed for our study constituted the minority

group in their relationships with the Israeli organizations. They possessed less resources, influence, and experience than the Israelis, and they were working in a society that is in a very different developmental stage. It is no wonder, therefore, that these differences in power relations and life circumstances lead the Palestinians to see the Israeli occupation of their lands as being tied to the poor state of their environment while they lead the Israelis to attributing other factors to environmental damage and neglect. This may also explain the differences in foci of environmental work; whereas the Palestinian NGOs tended to focus on issues directly connected to the occupation, such as land confiscation, the Israeli NGOs focused on more “neutral” and post-conflict issues, such as public transportation.

Our results also showed that when the two sides came together for joint work, they tended to do so for different reasons. The Palestinian NGOs emphasized that they engaged in cooperative projects with Israelis, not mainly because this work was important for the furthering of peace efforts, but because it was necessary for combating environmental damage and for preventing further deterioration. The Israeli NGOs, however, tended to link environmental work to peace work, seeing it as a boundary transcending process that could help solidify the peace process (Lane et al. 1995; Muller 1998). From this, we tentatively conclude here that, in spite of the effort and hard work that went into the projects carried out by the environmental NGOs from both sides, they did not really succeed in building “value communities” that helped them pursue their environmental objectives in culturally transcendent ways (Muller 1998). Furthermore, they had also not yet achieved a “culture of peace” (Ropers 1995) – a condition that may be important for NGOs working in societies in conflict that are trying to help the peace process along. This becomes even clearer when we note that since the renewal of violence, there have been very few instances of joint environmental/peace work.

As a final point, we will relate to the different perceptions that the Palestinian and Israeli NGOs appeared to hold concerning their role within their societies. Whereas the Israelis tended to hold a more traditional view of NGOs (Risse, Ropp & Sikkink 1999; Weiss & Gordenker 1996), as organizations that work outside the realm of state power, and are often at odds with official power holders, the Palestinian NGOs appeared to distinguish to a much lesser degree their work from that of the PNA government. This was evident in their avoidance of criticizing their government, of acting in accordance with directives handed down by the Authority during times of crisis, and their reticence about engaging in acts of civil disobedience. This result leads us to the understanding that, at the present, the social structures of the two societies differ so much from one another that environmentalists working within Israel and the PNA hold essentially different definitions of the role that NGOs should be playing. We see this difference as not merely a semantic one, but as one that also demands to be jointly explored by parties engaged in cooperative work.

Perhaps after the PNA achieves official statehood, the Israeli occupation is ended, and a significant reduction in violence occurs, the Palestinian NGOs will reassess their role, adopting the more commonly held definition of NGOs.

Endnote

Attempting to complete this study during the Al Aqsa Intifada was very difficult for us, from both a professional and emotional standpoint. The Palestinian researchers often found themselves in life-threatening and frightening situations and the Israelis could offer little more than small words of comfort. We were all exposed to the violence, which surrounded us, and to the intransigence of political leaders on both sides. As a result, the importance of our project paled in comparison to the meaning that the daily killings, maiming and destruction was having for our region. Perhaps the main conclusions that we have reached from this joint venture is that the good relationships, which appeared to characterize the Palestinian and Israeli environmental partners, were so fragile, that once there was a renewed eruption of violence, the desire and ability to keep up any level of cooperative work virtually disappeared. This has led us to the deeper understanding that achievement of peace between Palestinians and Israelis is a very long, difficult and multi-layered process. It is a process that not only demands time, but also deep long-lasting changes in perception concerning the other side. As long as the social and political relationships do not significantly change between the two peoples, then these joint ventures will remain susceptible to the forces that would pull them apart.

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Table 1: Jointly Run Palestinian and Israeli NGOs

Name of Organization	Objectives	Main activities
Friends of the Earth Middle East (FoEME) – umbrella organization for NGOs in Israel, PNA, Jordan and Egypt	Furthering regional sustainable development & peace; protection of the environment; creation of necessary conditions for lasting peace; capacity building & information sharing	Networking, conferences & workshops, projects focusing on transboundary ecosystems (e.g., Dead Sea Basic, sustainable tourism for the Gulf of Aqaba); renewable energy project; environmental impact of the Mediterranean Free Trade Zone, renewable energy demonstration program, environmental awareness programs; Middle Eastern environmental newsletter; independent environmental assessments of new projects associated with the peace process; evaluation of relationship between investments & sustainable peace with governments, private investors, financial institutions & the media

Israel/Palestine Center for Research and Information (IPCRI)	<p>Work toward peace through dialogue & negotiation, development of mechanisms for attainment & sustainability of peace, influencing policy & decision-makers.</p> <p>Objectives of environment section -- concentration on joint preservation of environment, equality in knowledge, management of resources & resolution of environmental conflicts.</p>	<p>Conferences on water management, hospital waste management, agricultural trade, industrialization, management of open spaces; expert meetings, research on air pollution, lead emissions, hazardous waste & micro-nutrient deficiency, publications, extension of library and data-base, involvement of women in environmental projects, courses on environmental issues, Environmental Mediation Center, small projects for water and waste management</p>
Palestinian Israeli Environmental Secretariat (PIES)	<p>To forge Palestinian-Israeli commitment to joint environmental protection by bringing together people from different sectors; to develop shared discourse & re-orientation of attitudes concerning the "other"; to promote sustainable development; to create mechanism for development of joint environmental projects that will upgrade the environmental infrastructure; to support Palestinian & Israeli NGOs in carrying out joint projects; to influence decision makers</p>	<p>Educational Programs – environmental summer schools for Palestinian and Israeli youth, Nature Knows No Boundaries, One Blue Sky Above Us; training courses for teachers; sustainable environmental Programs – ISO 9000 & ISO 14001 for Israeli and Palestinian business people; Student-to-Student Projects; Palestinian-Israeli Environmental Policy Initiative; Community Environmental Advocacy; Palestinian center for environmental research in Jericho.</p>

**Table 2 – Cooperating Palestinian Organizations and Areas of Interest
(alphabetically ordered)**

Name	Main areas of interest
Applied Research Institute of Jerusalem	Soil, water, air & other environmental elements studies
Association of Environment Protection	Environmental awareness programs & environmental summer camps
Center for Agricultural Services	Developing the agricultural sector
Environmental Protection and Research Institute	Research & development programs in environmental and public health issues.
Green Peace Association	Environmental awareness campaigns, Marine & fishery research programs, waste management & protection of natural reserves
Palestinian Agricultural Relief Committees	Developing the agricultural sector & improving rural areas
Palestinian Hydrology Group	Groundwater, surface water, public awareness training programs
Palestinian Society for the Protection of Environment and Nature	Environmental awareness programs & environmental summer camps
Soil, Water and Environment Institute	Water, wastewater & soil analysis
Water and Environmental Development Organization	Research in the environmental field, consultancy, training & education
Water and Environment Studies Center	Applied research in the fields of water, wastewater & soil.
Wildlife Palestine Society	Conservation & management of biodiversity, education & promotion of wildlife and nature

Table 3: Classification of Cooperating Israeli Organizations with their Main Activities (alphabetically ordered in each category)

Cooperation Not the Main Focus	Cooperation Important
B'tselem – water study of the Occupied Territories	Arava Institute for Environmental Studies (AIES) – training of environmental professionals, scientific research, environmental awareness, policy making
Coalition for Public Transportation – activities against construction of trans-Israel highway	Blaustein Institute for Desert Research (Ben Gurion University) – Rangeland Project
Galilee Society – health related environmental issues among Palestinian-Israeli population, data collection, advocacy	Hebrew University – Joint Palestinian – Israeli management of aquifer
Green Action – civil disobedience actions against globalization, trans-Israel highway, waste management, beach deterioration	International Center for Bird Studies (Migratory Birds Know No Boundaries) – research & educational activities
Greencourse – national university student organization involved in activities against trans-Israel highway construction, waste management, globalization	Living Weave – educational wildlife projects
Heschel Center – educational center, training of environmental professionals	Negev Institute for Peace and Development – empowerment of Palestinian people in many different areas
Israel Economic Forum for the Environment – “green standards” for Israeli & Palestinian businesses	
Life & Environment – umbrella organization of Israeli environmental & social NGOs	
Sustainable Jerusalem – sustainable development in greater Jerusalem	
Sustainable Negev – sustainable development of the Negev, joint water project with Palestinian partners	

Table 4: Environmental NGO Questionnaire Guide**Information and background about the director/interviewee**

Who are they? Profession Experience in environmental issues
Full/part time employment

Part 1 - General information about the NGO:

Organization name Address Phone & fax numbers E-mail & web site addresses
Contact People Date of foundation Objectives of this NGO

Main activities

Completed projects and projects for near future.

Funding sources

Scope

Experience with cooperation? If yes move to part 2, if no move to part 3 .

Part 2 – Questions for NGOs that have experienced cooperation

What are the reasons that made this organization dedicated to protect the environment?

Who were/are your partners?

How long have you been cooperating?

List of completed work and projects you have done together

Describe a project(s) that you have done together. How was it initiated & contact made? Who was responsible for the planning (one side, two sides, together)? How many people from each side participated? Describe the actual event – did people work together or separately? What was good about the activity? What was problematic? Based on your experience, would you like to plan a future joint project with the group? Do you have any projects planned with these partners in the near future?

What were the motivations and reasons of this cooperation?

Did you publicize your interests in cooperation? If yes, how? If no, why not?

In general, do you sum up your experiences with joint projects as negative or positive? Please explain.

What obstacles have you encountered during your cooperation? How did you deal with them?

What events have been helpful?

Do you intend to continue this cooperation or expand it?

What were the advantages and disadvantages of this cooperation?

Part 3 – Questions for all

Does your NGO have a mechanism for evaluating projects? If so, what is it? If not, how do you evaluate your work?

Do you think that there is a connection between the conflict and the damage that has been done to the environment? If yes, please explain why, giving examples if possible.

Do you think that resolution of the conflict will help improve the environment? If yes, please explain how you think this will happen. If no, why not?

Do you think that joint ecological project will enhance the peace process? How?

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We would like to thank the German Science and Development Ministry, The Deutsche Bank and The Peace Research Institute in Frankfurt (PRIF) for their generous support of the Palestinian – Israeli environmental NGO project described in the article. We would especially like to extend our thanks to Prof. Harald Mueller, of PRIF, for his scholarly, as well as moral support, during work on this study. Our thanks are extended to our research assistants Nashida Jubran, Orit Maman and Inbar Telman for their help with the interviewing and transcription processes. Finally, we thank the Lentz Peace Research Association of St. Louis and UMSL, for the fellowship granted to Dr. Chaitin who facilitated the writing of this article. Finally, we would like to thank Sean Byrne, and the anonymous referees for Peace and Conflict Studies for their constructive feedback on this paper.